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Immersion not baptism

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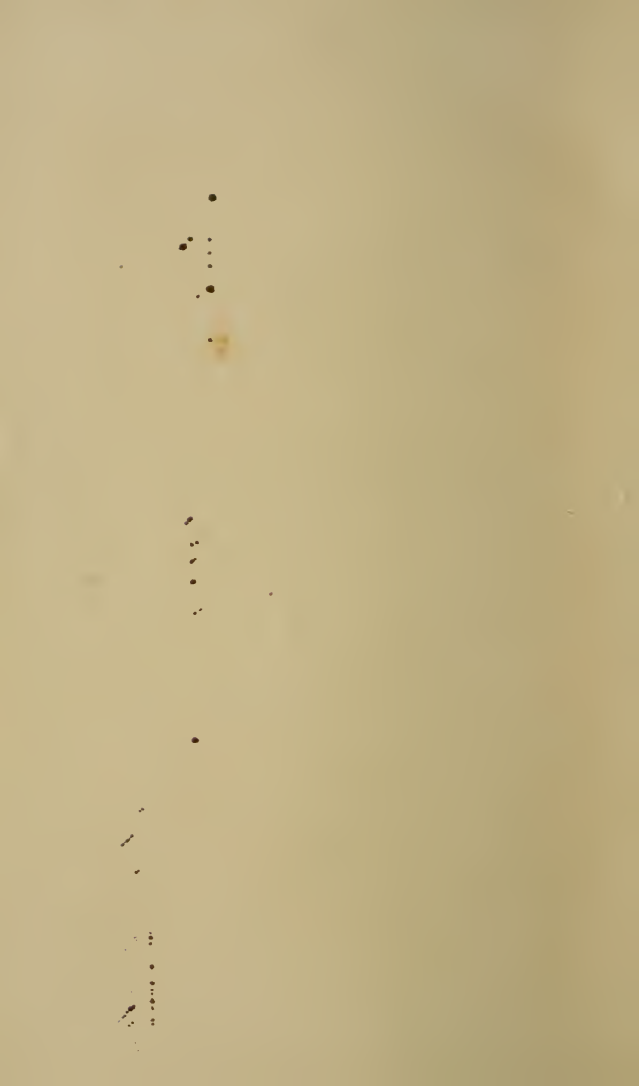
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# IMMERSION NOT BAPTISM.

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By REV. JOHN H. BECKWITH.

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## IMMERSION NOT BAPTISM.

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To assert that immersion is not baptism is to take very bold ground, undoubtedly, and therefore this Essay may strike nearly all men with surprise, some with astonishment, and, perhaps, some with offence.

It is the distinctive characteristic of one Church, of large membership and extensive influence, to maintain that there is no other baptism but immersion, and to treat all who have been baptized in any other way as unbaptized; many of them even re-translating the Scriptures so as to cause "Baptize," always to read "Immerse"; and nearly all denominations so far agree with them as to admit members by this mode, when it is requested.

To assert, then, that immersion is not baptism, may be offensive to some, though it should not be to those who hold to it

exclusively and who deny that sprinkling is baptism. It is simply doing in this sphere what they are doing in another. Will the reader, then, be candid, lay aside all prejudice, and attend to the proof? And it may be well to premise, that this will be brought forward in what the writer conceives to be the shortest possible manner consistent with the importance of the subject.

First: the inconvenience and difficulty of Immersion, as well as its indelicacy in many instances, make it highly probable that the Saviour did not make it the rite of initiation into his Church.

1. Its inconvenience and difficulty. It is inconvenient everywhere, except when meetings are held in the open air, and by the side of some body of water. In order to its performance it is necessary to leave the sanctuary and go to some place where sufficient water can be found to immerse the candidate. Not unfrequently has it been necessary to go a mile or two for this purpose, on the Sabbath day. And it is always necessary to repair to a river, or some body of water, unless there is a tank containing

a quantity nearer by, or in the church. In few countries is it at all seasons safe to immerse; and in some it is nearly impossible, especially in winter. It is dangerous in all parts of the world forty degrees from the equator, in winter; and in Lapland and Greenland, especially their northern portions, almost impossible from scarcity of water; and even if it could be obtained, its performance in the open air would probably result fatally. It is difficult and inconvenient everywhere, and in all climes; less so in warm than in cold, but even there often quite inconvenient; and it was so in the days of our Saviour and his disciples. For instance: immersion must have been inconvenient at the baptism of the jailor, at Phillippi, Acts 16: 33; also in the instance mentioned in Acts 10: 47, 48. Indeed, it would appear that in the latter case water was brought into the place of worship to enable them to perform the ceremony. The apostle said, "Can any man forbid water," *i. e.*, "Can any man forbid water to be *brought in*, that these should not be baptized." Now it is not reasonable to suppose that the apostle, moved by the

Holy Ghost, should command a hogshead or more of water to be brought in that the rite might be administered. The same difficulty existed in the baptism of Paul, and in nearly all the cases noticed in the New Testament, excepting those which were performed by or near a river. The idea of tanks being kept in all these places is simply an ingenious modern invention, to obviate the argument drawn from this very difficulty. There is no evidence, either in Scripture or ancient history, of such receptacles. Those spoken of at the marriage at Cana in Galilee held only two or three firkins apiece.

From its very nature it is inconvenient to immerse, and in many places and times absolutely impossible.

2. It is indelicate; many times indecent. Every one who has noticed is sensible that immersions, by the bank of a river especially, often lead to much light and loose conversation among those who look on. It is unnecessary to enter into a minute description of scenes often transpiring at such times and places, for all know that events do frequently occur which excite

laughter and furnish matter of scandal for some time after. Now unless the quantity of water is something, which it is not,—unless it does actually wash away sins,—it is fair to conclude that He who is purity itself never would have instituted the form of a rite which was to stand in all ages of the Church, and be practiced throughout the whole earth, and at the same time be liable to produce such a result. It would be contrary to the analogy of His nature and providence. He never does an unnecessary act, that which does not add to His glory, or the good of His creatures. He never commands His children to do that which will probably lead to impure thoughts, or impure words in others, thereby making them accessories.

The heathen gods are worshipped by rites that are not only inconvenient and profane, but absolutely licentious and obscene. Confusion, tumult, drunkenness, and debauchery, are compatible with their ceremonies and religious rites, if they do not even compose the rites themselves. But it is not so with the High and Holy One. He commands His children to abstain from

all impurity themselves, and to be careful not to do that which will lead to it in others. He gave the Israelites directions to construct their altars in such a manner as to prevent those who officiated from so appearing before the audience as to excite impure thoughts. See Exodus 20: 26.

Hence, as immersion is confessedly inconvenient and difficult, at some places impossible, and as it often excites laughter, and leads to impure thoughts, it is fair to conclude that the great Head of the Church did not command it.

Second: Baptism was a Jewish institution, well known, and in common practice in the days of our Saviour. The Pharisees baptized often. It was customary before eating, and after coming from the market; Mark 7: 2, 3, 5: "And when they saw the disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say with unbaptized hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they baptize their hands oft, eat not; holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they baptize they eat not. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked

Him, why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unbaptized hands?" Also Luke 11:38: "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first baptized before dinner." The translators have rendered the word "baptize" in our Bible "wash" and "washed," but the original is as above. This, then, proves that it was in common practice and well understood. And this is confirmed by various other Scripture proofs. In the epistle to the Hebrews Paul gives a general description of Jewish laws, manners, and customs, especially of their ritual worship; and, in recapitulating the law in regard to the worship of the tabernacle, he says, Heb. 9: 10: "Which stood in meats and drinks and *divers baptisms*, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation;" *i. e.*, one of the rites imposed on them by the great lawgiver was baptism; and these were many, or "divers," and from the passages already quoted, it is shown that they fully obeyed the law, and baptized often. They also practiced the baptism, or as it is rendered, the washing

(original, "baptism") of pots, cups, brazen vessels, and beds.—See Mark 7: 4. There is proof of the same also in John 1. The Jews sent a deputation to John to learn from his own lips whether he were the expected Christ, or Elias, or one of the prophets, and when he had informed them that he was neither, they asked him, v. 25, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet," or, as it reads in the margin, "a prophet." This was as much as to say, that it was *customary* for the prophets to baptize; and when the Messiah should come, they expected he would baptize; but if John was neither Christ nor that prophet, they wished to know by what authority he administered the rite. Afterward there arose a question among the Jews about purifying, as recorded in the third chapter of John. A deputation was sent to him to settle a question concerning the matter, who commenced their inquiries by introducing "baptism" for "purifying," thus showing that Jewish purifying and baptism were the same. The Jews practiced purifying daily,—legal, religious purifying,—and the name



by which it was described was baptism, as shown in the passages quoted from the seventh chapter of Mark.

Again; if the rite had not been well understood at that time, it would have been sufficiently described to enable those who came after to practice it without mistake, and with uniformity. This is done in the instance of the Lord's supper, so clearly and distinctly that we know just what to do in all its stages. But baptism, on the contrary, is abruptly introduced, with no description of its mode, clearly implying that it was a rite so well understood that it needed no more description than did the worship of God on the Sabbath. It is clear, then, that baptism was a Jewish institution well understood by the people to whom the Saviour preached, and in common practice. And from this it clearly follows that it must have been commanded by the law, — the law as given by Moses, — and it had the sanction of Him who instructed Moses, God himself. Otherwise it must have had its origin in the tradition of men; and the Saviour, who so frequently reproved and scouted all tradition, as useless, and sinful,

must have exhibited a strange contradiction to his own doctrine when he submitted to its authority in being baptized of John. And furthermore, Paul, in the passage already quoted, Heb. 9, declares as something which they all well understood, that it was imposed on them "until the time of reformation." From all these considerations it is proved that baptism was a rite enjoined in the original ceremonial law, and had the sanction of the Almighty, and was placed in their ritual worship by His express command. This, then, is fatal to immersion, for it is nowhere commanded in the Old Testament. Baptism was commanded, but immersion was not.

But what is baptism? It is not simply, with no form of words, plunging into the water, or throwing water upon, nor applying it, or anything else, to one's self. No, not even with a form of words. Nor is it an application of water as an ordinary act of cleansing, as one would cleanse his garments or his person from filth; but it is the *religious, or ritual application of water, by one having authority so to do, upon or to another.* The multitude did not baptize

themselves, nor did the Saviour baptize himself, but they were baptized by John. So the disciples were commanded to go into all the world, and teach all nations, and baptize them. And they carried out their instructions faithfully, going everywhere, teaching and baptizing. Hence, in baptism, one person applies water to another, or to a thing, as a ritual or a religious ceremony. And we are warranted in saying that nowhere in the ceremonial law, nowhere in the Old Testament, is one man commanded to immerse another, as a religious ceremony. There are directions that under certain circumstances men should wash themselves, and their clothes, and some might contend that in such cases they bathed, or immersed themselves; but in no place is there a command for one to immerse, or bathe, or wash another religiously or legally. Hence, if baptism was performed by immersion in the days of our Saviour, it must have originated in the traditions of men, and he must have exhibited the strange anomaly of submitting to a rite that had no authority from the Old Testament, simply growing out of the

commandments of men! It is safe to say that this he never would do, and hence, baptism, by which he "fulfilled all righteousness," was not by immersion, and therefore immersion is not baptism.

Third: The language used by our Saviour in its description shows that the element is applied to the candidate, and not the candidate to the element. It is baptizing "with water," "with the Holy Ghost," and "with fire." John 1: 31: "Therefore am I come baptizing with water;" the same is the usual form of words by which it is designated. And that the word "with" is the true one is shown by such passages as these: Matt. 3: 11: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." Acts 1: 5: "John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Now, if it be shown that in the event, the element, or the Holy Ghost, descended upon them, or was applied to them, it follows that we have the true preposition, *i. e.* that it should be "with." The first fulfillment is found in Acts 2: 3, 4:

“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues.” It “sat upon them,” “entered into them,” “they were filled with it,” *i. e.* it was applied to them. The apostle Peter has, in another place, given a definite and specific description of this baptism, showing the same. Acts 11: 15, 16: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord how that he said John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” That is, this was the fulfillment of the promise of the Saviour, “Ye shall be baptized *with* the Holy Ghost.” They were baptized, but not by immersion; proving, so far, that immersion is not baptism. It was applied to them, and hence the correctness of the word “with” is established. From this it is evident that immersion must be excluded. The usage of language is fatal to it. No English scholar would say, Immerse *with* water. All must see, on reading the last

scripture quoted, viz., Acts 11: 15, 16, that the baptism with the Holy Ghost was not by immersion. They were baptized *with* the Holy Ghost. It "fell on them." And hence it is proved by the usage of language that immersion is not baptism.

Fourth: There was the baptism of the children of Israel in the cloud, and in the sea. 1 Cor. 10: 1, 2: "All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." This baptism will show us something as to the mode, and it is certain that it was not by immersion. They passed through the sea on dry ground. Read over the history recorded in the 14th chapter of Exodus, and the conclusion is irresistible that the baptism in, or by the sea, was not by immersion. The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong wind. It was piled up, became a wall on either hand, and the only form in which the water could have reached them was by the sprinkling of the spray. That, then, in this case, is taken as the mode. Thus they were baptized in the sea. And the cloud that had gone be-

fore them, moved, and went backward; and as it passed over it rained upon them, and thus baptized them. Describing this scene, the Psalmist says the clouds poured out water. Psalm 77: "Thou art the God that doeth wonders. Thou hast with thine own arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid; the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water." Here was a full description of the whole scene, given in poetic language, describing the fleeing of the waters before the command of God, and also showing what was the action of the clouds; informing us that the baptism by the cloud, or in the cloud, was by sprinkling, was by rain. The clouds poured out water, which, in falling, sprinkled, baptized, legally cleansed the children of Israel from the defilement of Egypt, and set them apart, consecrated them unto Moses and unto God. This is the true idea or intent of baptism, a cleansing, purification from defilement, and a formal consecration, setting apart for God. Then, and there, and thus they were set apart for

Him. The apostle declares that they were baptized; and as they were not immersed, something else was baptism.

Fifth: Look at the baptism of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 5:21: He was driven from the sons of men, and his body was wet with the dews of heaven, till seven times passed over him. The version of Scripture in use in the days of our Saviour was that known as the Septuagint, which was a translation of the Hebrew and Chaldee into Greek, by order of Ptolemy Philadelphus, about three hundred years B.C. It was from this that his quotations were made. Of course, therefore, it was authoritative; and its rendering of the Hebrew was correct, according to the use of the language then common among the people. In describing this wetting, it reads "his body was baptized," etc. From this fact we can be at no loss as to the understanding of the translators of the Hebrew into the Greek of the Septuagint, or the meaning of the word "baptize," in the language then used. His body was baptized by the dews of heaven, as it ordinarily descends; and we are to bear in mind that in or near



Babylon the dew is much greater in quantity than with us. There it more nearly resembles a gentle rain. Hence, his baptism was of the same character as the baptism of the children of Israel by the cloud. His baptism was from above him; sprinkling, and not immersion. This account, therefore, gives additional force to our proposition, showing that immersion is not baptism.

Sixth: There are the "divers baptisms" spoken of by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews. While describing the ancient worship, and the forms and ceremonies of the Jewish law, he said, Heb. 9: 10: "Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers baptisms, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." Our translators have rendered it "divers washings," but the original is "baptisms." And here, if anywhere, is the error of the translators in the treatment of the word "baptize." Nowhere in the New Testament does it more surely apply to a religious ceremony than here. But from a careful examination it appears that it is invariably applied to a sacred rite; or,

if there be exceptions, they do not apply to any of the cases named in this argument. It would appear, then, that the word should have been uniformly treated, especially when it was clear that it applied to the same, or a similar rite. If translated at all, it should have been so in every instance, and if transferred in one place, then it should have been in every place. Then ordinary readers, at least, would not have been misled. Here, as in other places, it should have been rendered "baptisms."

It is shown, then, from the original language, that "divers baptisms" were imposed on the children of Israel by their ceremonial law, which were to continue till the times of reformation, or until worship should be reëstablished and reformed by the Messiah. This passage was quoted to show that baptism was a Jewish rite, and in common practice in the time of Christ, and had existed from Moses to Christ. But we have before seen that there is no law commanding immersion as a religious ceremony, no direction for one man to immerse another as an act of cleansing. "Divers baptisms" were imposed, and as immer-

sions were not, it follows clearly that immersion is not baptism. If the description of the rite heretofore given be the true one, and it is so treated by all evangelical Christians, this amounts to a demonstration.

It is then shown, 1st: that convenience and propriety are against immersion.

2. That baptism was a rite in common practice in the days of our Saviour; and as he sanctioned it by his own practice, it must have been derived, not from tradition, but from the law, which nowhere commands immersion.

3. The words used in its description show, from the laws of language, that the element was applied to the candidate, and the same is confirmed in the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and hence it could not be immersion.

4. The baptism of the children of Israel in the cloud, and in the sea, was not by immersion.

5. The divers baptisms imposed on them by their great lawgiver were not by immersion.

6. The baptism of Nebuchadnezzar was not by immersion.

And hence it is deemed to be proved that immersion is not baptism.

What, then, is the true mode of Baptism? Let the appeal be made at once to the word of God, and if the answer can be clearly brought forth, let it settle this question forever. "To the law, and to the testimony."

All must see that if we can find *a* mode in the Bible, that must be the end of the controversy, unless there be some change on record.

The baptism by the Spirit we have seen on the day of Pentecost, and at the preaching of Peter, when it "fell on them."

The application of water in the baptism in the cloud, or by the cloud, and by the sea, we have already shown was by sprinkling; and it is fair to infer from that fact, that this is the Bible meaning of the word when applied to this rite. Because the cloud poured out water, and the people were baptized by being sprinkled, it follows that Bible baptism is sprinkling.

In the baptism of Nebuchadnezzar by the dews of heaven, the water was applied in the same manner. Thus the proof ac-

cumulates. In two clear instances the water was applied by sprinkling. If we look carefully, we shall find that this was the invariable mode of its application.

There was the baptism of pots, cups, brazen vessels, and tables, or beds. For what purpose were they baptized, and what was the mode? Also the divers baptisms spoken of by Paul in the passage alluded to in Hebrews. It has already been shown that these were not performed by immersion. How then was the rite administered? The book of Ecclesiasticus, written in Greek, cotemporary with the Septuagint, furnishes us with a key to unlock the whole difficulty. Although Ecclesiasticus is not canonical, yet so far as its description of a rite, form, or ceremony is concerned, it is just as good authority as any part of the Bible; for it shows what was the practice then, and describes it in the same language used by Christ and John. The writer speaks of a rite that cleansed, or legally purified, a person rendered unclean by contact with a dead body, and calls that rite baptism. Now if we can find a rite that cleansed a person thus un-

clean, and ascertain the mode of its application, we know what was baptism,—what the Jews themselves called baptism; and their decision must be final. The author says, Eccl. 34: 25: “He that is baptized after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again what availeth his baptism.” In the translation it is rendered “washeth,” and “washing,” but the original is “baptism.” If we can find a Jewish rite that availed any thing to cleanse a person thus made legally unclean, we have the real light we need. The law in regard to that matter is recorded in the 19th chapter of Numbers. At the 13th verse the Lord said to Moses: “Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him he shall be unclean;” and at the 20th verse: “The man that shall be unclean (*i. e.* by contact with a dead body) and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation; because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of sep-

aration hath not been sprinkled upon him ; he is unclean." If we turn back to the 10th verse we learn that this shall be a statute forever. Now what was the rite that purified the man from his uncleanness? He was commanded to bathe himself and wash his own clothes: was not this the purification, and therefore the rite, to which Ecclesiasticus refers? This question must be answered in the negative, for these did not produce the legal cleansing. The Lord himself says, v. 13: "*Because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him he shall be unclean.*" He might have washed his clothes, he might have bathed himself, and even though he had been immersed, or had water poured upon him, or had any other rite performed, no matter what its nature or mode, still, unless he had been sprinkled,—unless the water of separation had been sprinkled upon him,—he was unclean, and the command was that he should be destroyed. This is conclusive. It is demonstration. It must stand and will stand forever. God gave to Israel, through Moses, a rite which would purify a man rendered unclean by contact with a dead body.

That rite was perpetuated, handed down through subsequent history. The writer of Ecclesiasticus, himself a Jew, and familiar with all their religious forms and rites, describing it in the same language in which the Septuagint was written, and in the same language used in the New Testament, calls it *baptism*, showing that this was the meaning of that word when applied to this rite. And by reference to the law itself we find that it was performed by sprinkling only. Here, then, in spite of all argument, all sophistry, all appeal to the classics, all *loud* talking, the rite known among the Jews at the time of Christ as baptism, was performed by sprinkling *only*. It did not originate with John the Baptist. It was described by Ecclesiasticus long before his day, and was instituted by Moses at the express command of God. Can the candid, the unprejudiced mind fail to be convinced?

Having found the key, the whole subject is unlocked and thrown open. Here we find the meaning of the divers baptisms, and the occasion of baptizing pots, cups and beds, as also the mode of the rite. By referring to the same chapter (Num. 19) from



which we have learned what rite cleansed an unclean person, we learn that their defilement was the same, and also that their cleansing or purification was performed in the same manner; being neither in its design nor mode an ordinary washing or cleansing, but purely a religious rite. Verses 14 and 15: "This is the law when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel which hath no covering bound upon it is unclean." This was the statute making these things unclean. And the 18th verse gives the rule for their cleansing: "A clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there." This passage shows clearly what was the object of the cleansing, purification, or baptism, and it is particular, also, in describing the *mode* of cleansing. And here, as in the case of the impure man, the water was to be applied by sprinkling only. This is what was meant by the allusion in the New Testament. It was not the cleansing of these articles from

actual filth, with much water and a liberal mixture of soap, but a religious rite derived from this law, and made perpetual in one of the sections of the statute. And the Jews were faithful to the letter of the law. They cleansed, baptized every thing they used in their houses, and, as the law made him unclean who came in contact with even a bone of the dead, they finally adopted the practice of religiously sprinkling often. When they came from the market, as they might have come in contact with one who was defiled, and would consequently communicate his defilement to them, they resorted regularly to their ritual cleansing. Mark 7: "And when they come from the market except they baptize they eat not." The tradition of the elders did not introduce the rite, but simply applied it to these and similar occasions. In this way they legally made clean the outside of the cup and the platter. And these are the "divers baptisms," so often alluded to, imposed on them, not by the priests, but by the law, and only multiplied by the elders. It has already been shown from John 1, that their purifying and bap-

tism were the same. The terms were used interchangeably. Hence the mode of performing the rite was well understood, and needed no more description than any other which was specifically laid down in the law. From these facts it necessarily follows that the only scriptural mode of baptism is sprinkling.

Apply this decision to the question of convenience and propriety, and it will be found in sweet and perfect harmony with both. Apply the words of the Saviour which describe it as water applied to the candidate, and it is the only mode which is wholly consistent. The analogy between this legal cleansing and the cleansing of the soul and the conscience by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, is clear, and the harmony is perfect. The one is the type or the symbol of the other. By the sprinkling of water, the candidate is set apart and cleansed in the sight of the world; by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, the soul is cleansed and set apart in the sight of God.

And there is nothing opposed to it even in the fact that John performed his mission

at Jordan, or where there were "many waters," at Ænon. Why, the multitudes of people would demand much more water to drink than would be necessary even to immerse them. And it is worthy of notice that on the most ancient medals struck to represent the rite performed at Jordan, the candidate is represented as standing in the water while John sprinkles him. All the evidence, therefore, in the case, drawn from the word of God, proves that in baptism the water is applied by sprinkling, and that only. And with these facts the controversy would seem to be ended; the *proof is complete, is demonstrative*.

It was noticed in the outset of this argument that the Baptists hold the precise opposite of this doctrine. It will therefore be necessary to look briefly at their positions. What are they? They are founded principally upon the heathen interpretation of the word, and some figures in the Scriptures. They rely, first, upon the meaning of the word as found in Greek literature, and, second, on the definition found in the lexicons. It does not seem that any attempt has been made to interpret by the Scriptures them-

selves. There is little strength in these positions when properly assailed. As to the lexicons, they give as many as fifteen significations to the words *bapto* and *baptizo*. One of these is immersion, and one of them is sprinkling, and still there remain thirteen others to be disposed of. Now it would be just as preposterous to hit upon one of these definitions, and say that in this controversy it always means that, as to take some other, and say it always means this,—just as unsatisfactory to say it always means immersion, as to say it always means dying, or sprinkling. The lexicons, therefore, cannot settle the question. Then, as to the use of the word in heathen Greek, the fact has been strangely overlooked that in their literature the word is never used in reference to a religious rite, but always to something secular, or common. There are thousands of words in all languages whose signification depends upon the connection in which they are found. Let any one look at our own language and see how diverse the meaning of the same word often is when applied to different things, and he cannot but be satis-

fied on this point. Therefore, if the meaning of the word *baptizo* is to be determined by the use made of it in the classic or heathen Greek, it must be shown that it has a uniform meaning when applied to a religious rite. But no quotation has ever been made wherein it is applied to such a subject; therefore, whatever be its meaning when referring to other things, it weighs nothing in this case, when it comes in conflict with its meaning as found in the Scriptures. And it is well to note that its heathen meaning is not uniform in any one thing. It is from that that its fifteen different significations have been derived. Much more pains should have been taken to ascertain its meaning in the Scriptures before a resort was had to any other source. *Our* appeal has been only to the Scriptures; and having found the meaning of the word as used there, the lexicons and the classics could not alter the conclusions arrived at, even if they flatly contradicted the Bible, which they do not in the slightest particular.

An argument for immersion is also manufactured from history. It is said that his-

tory records that this was the early practice of the churches, and the conclusion drawn is, that it was therefore the primitive mode. But if all the doctrines and practices which obtained in the first three centuries of our era were therefore sanctified, we should have a Christianity consisting of all absurdities, and a rule which is a bundle of contradictions. Every creed finds authority in this prolific fountain. But, admitting that it is authority on this subject, it proves too much for the Baptists, for it clearly proves infant baptism to have been so general that early writers declared that they never knew of any who denied baptism to infants. If it be claimed as authority therefore, those who rely upon it should, to be consistent, at once resort to infant baptism.

And, secondly, it is shown that in the early ages, or at the same date when immersion was practiced, it was also customary to administer the rite at midnight, and with the candidate, of either sex, in a state of absolute nudity!! History therefore is just as good authority for this practice as for immersion; and those who rely upon it

should, to be consistent, baptize the candidate naked. But the mere statement of the fact shows at once that this was something introduced by the darkness or the wickedness of the age. The Saviour never instituted such a rite.

But the evidence from history may also be adduced in favor of sprinkling, as it shows that that too was practiced. It is probable that some of the teachers of that day understood those passages which command "washing" to apply to the administrator, instead of the candidate, and that they therefore conceived it to be their duty not only to baptize but also to wash their converts; and therefore they first sprinkled, or baptized, and then immersed, or washed them. This is said to be the practice of the Greek church at this day. The facts of history, therefore, are insufficient to establish any mode. And hence we must fall back upon the simple authority of Scripture.

The next application is to the baptism of John. It is contended that he instituted the rite, and that his mode of administering it was by immersion. The former we have fully shown is incorrect, and as to the mode,



that must have followed the original law, unless it was changed by him, of which we have no account: His mode, therefore, instead of immersion, must have been sprinkling. But why did he preach and baptize in the wilderness? Manifestly because the prophets had foretold that that should be the locality of his labors. He was to be "the voice of one crying in the wilderness;" his mission, to prepare the way of the Lord, or to prepare for his coming, as Moses prepared for the descent of God on Mount Sinai. There was the pattern or the type, and it is safe to say that the antetype corresponded; the mode of purification was the same. Moses exhorted the people, or preached to them, and then sanctified or purified them by sprinkling; or, in other words, baptized them. And so John came, preaching in the wilderness, and God moved all the people to go out to him; and after reproofing, and exhorting them, he, too, purified them according to the law of Moses; hence the mode must have been sprinkling. Indeed the very prophet who foretells him as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, subsequently,

and apparently in the same discourse, adds the prediction, "so shall he sprinkle many nations."

Moreover, in no other way could John have baptized the vast multitude who came out to him. Matt. 3: 5, 6: "Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." See also Mark 1: 5. Competent historians have calculated that in the region there described, there must have been at that time six millions of people. Mark tells us they were *all* baptized of him in Jordan. Now it was utterly impossible for John to baptize that number by immersion, or by any mode other than sprinkling, and that too in the same manner in which Moses sprinkled or baptized the people, they standing up, and he sprinkling the multitude together. His principal occupation was that of preaching, and his whole term of labor, in the estimation of some, did not exceed six months; others compute it at a year. But in either, or in *two* years, any schoolboy can see that it was impossible for him to immerse them, or even to sprinkle them one by one.

The baptism of Christ is also often appealed to, and it is well to turn to that in this connection.

For what purpose was he baptized? Not surely for ordinary purification, for he was in no sense impure; it was not the baptism of repentance, for he had nothing to repent of; not for the seal of his confession, for he made no confession;—but, plainly, to be legally set apart for his office as teacher or priest; to conform to the law of Moses on entering upon his public ministry. Thus he fulfilled all righteousness, or fulfilled the law. As God had given special rules for setting apart a priest, if he had neglected them he would have been a breaker of the Father's law. But he conformed to the law in regard to this just as he subsequently directed those healed by him to offer for their cleansing the gift which Moses commanded.—See Luke 5: 14. To fulfill all righteousness, in this case, was to enter the teacher's office in conformity with the law. Hence he must have been set apart for his work in the same manner, and by the same mode as God commanded Moses; and by turning

to the book of the law we at once perceive how this setting apart was performed. Numbers 8: 6, 7: "The Lord said unto Moses, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them to cleanse them. Sprinkle the water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and make themselves clean."\* The work then that Moses performed upon the Levite in *making him a priest*, or setting him apart for his office, like all the other ritual cleansings in the ceremonial law, was sprinkling. Subsequently the history relates the event, v. 21: "The Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes." And this rule or law was made perpetual. Therefore the conclusion is inevitable, that as Christ was set apart for his office agreeably to the law of Moses, if he fulfilled the law he was set apart, or baptized, by sprinkling, and in no other way. Nor does the fact

\* The question has often arisen, when did the rite of baptism as a dedicatory rite first occur? It is shown by this passage that it existed certainly at this time, for this cleansing was not only a purification but a setting apart for the service of God, a dedication.

that he was baptized at or in Jordan in any way affect the argument, for in *no other way could he fulfill the law*. We cannot follow Christ spiritually in his baptism, for he was pure, while we are sinful; but if we would conform to the same mode in the ceremony, we can come to no other conclusion than that we find it set forth in the law of Moses, and that it was sprinkling.

It is very common to quote Pedobaptist writers: "It must be so, for even your own teachers admit it; your most learned men admit that immersion is baptism." And yet admissions or assertions have nothing to do with the question. Is it proved? If not, the admissions of *a world* would prove nothing. It was once admitted that the world was one vast plain!

Considerable stress is laid upon the words "into," and "out of," "going down into the water," and "coming up out of the water." Baptists quote the baptism of the eunuch, and say: "Here we take our stand. They went down into the water, and of course the eunuch was immersed." But pause a moment; what real proof is furnished by this history in favor of any

particular mode? The fact that they both went down into the water, — allowing that to be so, — no more proves that the eunuch was immersed, than it does that Philip went under the water. From the mere recital nothing definite appears as to the mode, and as we have before proved that sprinkling was the only mode, it as readily follows that that was the mode of its performance, as it would have followed that immersion was, had that been proved to be the only mode. This passage does not afford us any light, unless it comes from the book, and that portion of it which the eunuch was reading. How should he have known any thing of baptism if he had not learned it from the book which he was reading? The quotations which are particularly alluded to in this case, are taken from the 53d chapter of Isaiah; and in the last verse of the preceding chapter, only six verses preceding the quotation, Isaiah said: “So shall he sprinkle many nations,” or, as it now appears, so shall he baptize many nations. It is natural to conclude, therefore, that Philip, in explaining the Scripture, explained to him also

the meaning of the sprinkling, or baptism, and that this led to the request with which Philip so readily complied. The inference certainly is this, and any other would seem unnatural. As to the meaning of the Greek words, translated "into" and "out of," it is a well-established fact that the translation would have been just as faithful to the original, if they had been rendered "to" and "from." All that is really proved, therefore, is that they went down *to* the water and came up *from* the water. If it goes any farther than this, it rather shows from the whole subject that the mode adopted was sprinkling.

Much stress is also laid upon certain figures of baptism, such as "buried," "planted," and the like. Col. 2: 12: "Buried with him in baptism." Romans 6: 4, 5: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." These passages are held before the world as conclusive evidence that immersion is the only baptism. The claim is, that it is like his death in form;

buried or planted in the *likeness* of his death. In no sense is it true that immersion is like his death. Was the Saviour drowned? If not, what is there in immersion that corresponds with the form of his death? But the form of the likeness is entirely different. In the one case there was a suspension between the heavens and the earth, the nails rankling in his hands and feet; in the other a plunging wholly under water. Here is literally no likeness. And then as to his burial. In one sense he was not buried. His body was taken down from the cross, and laid in a new tomb, large enough for a man to sit or stand in. It was not buried. And no burial is like immersion, unless it be a burial in the sea. With us the earth is first removed, and then the coffin is lowered into the open grave, and then the earth is thrown on in small quantities until the grave is filled. In this there is a greater likeness to sprinkling, or pouring, than to immersion. But the figure has no reference to a form; its reference is only spiritual. We are crucified with him; but that does not mean that we are taken up and nailed to a cross as he



was. Rather the crucifixion is spiritual; the "old man" is crucified,—not the body, but the affections and lusts. So in baptism. By repentance and the new birth we have put on a new life, and the old life is dead; and then, by baptism, we are consecrated to Him. We are dead to sin, and by baptism our death is publicly set forth. And to intensify the expression, we (our old self) are said to be not only dead, but "buried." Just as the Indian says when the war is over "the hatchet is buried," so by this solemn and sacred rite are we declared to be not only dead but *buried*. And this is all that can be legitimately deduced from such figures.

One more passage, and this review will close. Heb. 10: 22: "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." "Bodies washed"; does this mean immersion? Is it not rather simply a rehearsal of the successive stages or acts of purification according to the law? First, the baptism, the sprinkling by the priest, indicating the cleansing of the heart, and then the washing of the body which was to be performed

by the candidate himself. Thus was he sprinkled in his baptism, and thus he made himself externally clean by washing. This was the rule. This was the order and requirement laid upon Paul: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." The baptism was performed by Ananias, the washing by Paul himself.

Finally, the prediction of sealing his own for himself, describes sprinkling; but never any thing else. In Isaiah, as we have seen, after suffering for sins, and redeeming the world, he says: "Then shall he sprinkle many nations." In the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, when describing the final triumph of the gospel, and the transforming power of the spirit, he says: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean." Thus they should be set apart for him. But enough; all this seems to point but in one direction, and that is that baptism is sprinkling. Even the passages and figures relied on by immersionists, instead of weakening rather strengthen this conclusion. It is therefore proved by numerous passages and examples, embracing all those where the mode can be arrived at,

either in the New or Old Testaments, that immersion is not baptism; and adding the conclusion last arrived at, namely, that sprinkling only is, it is deemed that the proposition, immersion is not baptism, bold, startling, and offensive, as it may be, is fully sustained. The question may arise at this point, Does not this conclusion exclude from communion all persons baptized by any other mode? So reason the strict, or Close-communion Baptists, but without due warrant, even on the supposition that they are correct as to the mode. It does not appear from the Scripture that the primitive church to whom the first sacrament was administered, the disciples, had been baptized; certainly they had not been by Christian baptism. They did not even understand the nature of that rite, nor was the command to baptize in the name of Christ given until after his resurrection. — Matt. 28. John's baptism, was "unto repentance" and his disciples were rebaptized when introduced into the Christian Church. — Acts 19: 1-6. Christian baptism in spirit is baptism into his death, or a public profession of faith in his atone-

ment, as well as a setting apart; a consecration to the Trinity. This was not understood prior to his death. Even the disciples rejected the idea of his death. Hence it is not proved that baptism is an absolute prerequisite to communion. The ground taken by the General Baptists is more in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. It is, in substance, to reject a man who denies the validity, or necessity of the rite, but to receive those to their communion who admit the necessity, and according to their own judgment have been baptized. They believe and teach that immersion only is baptism; but, without pretending to be infallible, they do not hesitate to sit at the sacramental table with one who believes in another form, if the rite has been administered to him according to his own faith.

This view appears to be in harmony with the spirit of Christianity, applied to fallible human reasoning and diverse human judgment. Let every man judge himself in this ordinance, for to his own master he must stand or fall. While, therefore, it is the object of this argument to prove one

particular doctrine, it does not seek to compel men beyond their convictions; and in the matter of the sacrament it leaves the table perfectly free to all who in their own judgment have obtained a right to it by being made the subjects of that ceremony, whatever its form, which in their belief is baptism.







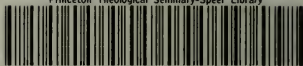








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